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# Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs

## The Early Duterte Presidency in the Philippines

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# Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte's Rise to Power

Nicole Curato

**Abstract:** Citizens who support populist leaders are often portrayed in negative terms. They are disparaged for their prejudice and naiveté, some even earning the label “basket of deplorables” from Hillary Clinton. Rodrigo Duterte's supporters were not exempted from such criticism. In the 2016 Philippine presidential race, they were pejoratively labelled *Dutertards*, which pathologised their fervent and unrelenting support for the controversial candidate. This article interrogates such depictions by examining the logics that underpin Duterte's strong public support. I argue that part of Duterte's appeal hinges on “penal populism,” built on two political logics that reinforce each other: the politics of anxiety and the politics of hope. While the former foregrounds the language of crisis, danger and uncertainty, the latter reclaims democratic agency. The article examines the articulations of these logics among Duterte's supporters based on ethnographic fieldwork in disaster-affected communities where Duterte enjoyed decisive victories.

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**Keywords:** Philippines, Philippine politics, populism, public sphere, Rodrigo Duterte, elections

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## Introduction

The Trump of the East, Duterte Harry, The Punisher – these are some of the more colourful names the new Philippine president has earned from the press. “He’s a colourful guy”, said US President Barack Obama. Rodrigo Duterte’s unconventional political style, demonstrated by the profanity-laced tirades whose targets range from the president of the United States to Pope Francis, has led to the creation of one of the most notorious demagogues of the international press. He is the crude yet shrewd politician, the local mayor who fanned the flames of public discontent and became president.

However, his supporters are equally intriguing. As the president’s catalogue of gaffes grows longer, his level of public support remains solid, manifested by a 91 per cent trust rating during his first week in office (*Pulse Asia Research* 2016a). A political economy perspective suggests that Duterte’s popularity comes from a frustrated middle class that has been excluded from the Philippines’ economic gains in the past six years. Duterte’s politics of “I will” holds the promise of swifter delivery of services that are much needed in urban centres with crumbling public infrastructure. Others have taken a less charitable view and warned against the emergence of a fascist movement. A cursory look at online forums can lead one to think that Duterte’s supporters are blind followers whose moralities have been compromised. They are the personalities who call for killing sprees, scream bias at journalists, threaten rape and murder, while running the gamut of misogynistic comments. *Dutertards*, as they are pejoratively called, are pathologised as political “retards” pinning their hopes on a messianic leader.

This article<sup>1</sup> aims to critically interrogate these depictions of Duterte supporters by examining the political logics that drive public support towards a controversial president. This argument is based on a two-year research project among disaster-affected communities in Tacloban City, Philippines. I argue against the depiction of Duterte supporters during the campaign as fanatical devotees, and instead suggest that such support is a product of constant negotiation between the politics of anxiety and the politics of hope. While the former gains currency from the vocabu-

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lary of fear, crisis and danger, the latter is animated by enactments of democratic agency among citizens who have been in the margins of politics for a long time. These logics are in tension but also mutually reinforce each other. The politics of anxiety constricts the space of political discourse by invoking the tough language of war against drugs and criminality. It fuels what sociologists of deviance calls “penal populism”, a political style that builds on collective sentiments of fear and demands for punitive politics (Pratt 2007). I argue that fear and anxiety are not the only driving forces for penal populism. Part of this is the logic of hope, which broadens the scope of what electoral politics can achieve through methods that vastly depart from the machine politics that been characteristic of Philippine elections. I reflect on the normative implications of these findings and offer conjectures on the future of the Philippine public sphere.

## Who Laughs at a Rape Joke? The Populist Appeal

A controversial speech in the Amoranto Sports Complex in Quezon City was a turning point for Duterte’s candidacy. In this packed stadium, Duterte recalled the story of a prison siege in Davao City 27 years earlier, which ended in a bloodbath. Duterte was mayor of Davao City at that time. In his usual rambling speech, he narrated the moment he saw the corpse of a 36-year-old Australian missionary named Jaqueline Hamill. During the siege, Hamill was raped, used as human shield, and brutally murdered, with her throat slit by one of the inmates. “What went through my head was that they raped her”, Duterte said. “That everyone had lined up to rape her. I got angry. That she was raped? Yes, that too. But it was that she was so beautiful – the mayor should have been first. What a waste.”

A remark so controversial could have been a fatal mistake for a candidate who had just topped the polls, but the electorate was undeterred. Duterte maintained his 11-point lead over independent candidate Grace Poe (*Pulse Asia Research* 2016b). The “rape joke”, together with Duterte’s slew of remarks about criminals being “legitimate targets of assassination”, drew the ire of human rights advocates but did little to discredit his popularity.

The concept of populism can help make sense of Duterte’s appeal to the over 16 million Filipinos who voted him into office. The precise definition of populism continues to be a point of contention in political studies. For some, populism is an ideology – albeit a “thin” one – that

articulates people's resentment against ruling classes that have monopolised "power, property, breeding and culture" (Shils 1956: 101; Mudde 2004). For others, populism has no ideological core and is better defined by its "social base". It refers to those who are increasingly frustrated with their declining status in society, rendering them vulnerable to "irrational protest ideologies", which can range from fascism to racism and nationalism, among other things (see Lipset 1960: 173; Moffitt 2015).

While populism's relationship to ideology remains contentious, there is a broad consensus among political theorists about the logic underpinning populism, which is the construction of an antagonism between "the people" and "the dangerous other" (Canovan 1999; Taggart 2000; Laclau 2005). Such dichotomisation of the political makes it possible to compare politicians who promote left-wing politics, as in the case of Kirchner in Argentina, or right-wing ideologies, as in the case of Erdoğan in Turkey (see Aytac and Öniş 2014). As S. Erdem Aytac and Ziya Öniş have suggested, there are "Varieties of Populism", with some distinguishing the people from corrupt elites, while in some cases, populists pillory immigrants and refugees for undermining the West's way of life.

In Duterte's case, the populist dichotomy is one between virtuous citizens versus hardened criminals – the scum of society who, for Duterte, are beyond redemption. Penal populism is a term that can capture this phenomenon (Pratt 2007). Originally used to describe political rhetoric that taps into the public's punitive stance, penal populism results to harsher mechanisms for social control to address the public's demand to be "tough on crime". This is held in contrast to "penal elitism", which privileges the authority of experts and professionals in shaping the criminal justice system. While Duterte's predecessor, Benigno S. Aquino, prioritised programmes that fight crimes in a "deliberate, programmatic and sustained manner" (*The Official Gazette* 2015), Duterte's appeal lies in his promise to overcome the corrupt bureaucracy in the justice system and deliver peace and order in a swift and decisive manner.

Performance is very much part of this process of claim-making, often defined by tabloid-style communication (Canovan 1999; Moffitt 2015). For Benjamin Moffitt, the coarsening of political discourse is part of the populist appeal for the use of slang, swearing and political incorrectness – the "colourful" language Obama referred to when describing Duterte – are manifestations of disregard for established ways of doing politics. This makes the comparison between Duterte and US President Donald Trump plausible, although to a limited extent. Both leaders invoke the narrative of crisis, which legitimises their unconventional meth-

ods of political campaigning. Duterte's machismo – from his rough language to his misogynistic remarks – is central to the populist performance, for machismo is essential to the narrative of crushing the “dangerous other” to save the Republic.

While vocabulary of populism can generate insight into the kind of populism that is present in today's mediated political landscape, relatively little has been said about the public in which such logic is embedded. It is convenient to dismiss the populists' constituencies as fanatics who fall prey to a manipulative politician. However, to pathologise populist publics is to gloss over the dynamic characteristics of populism, such as the ways in which “the people” is constructed, negotiated and redefined. After all, populist claims to representation are a two-way street: “the represented play a role in choosing representatives, and representatives ‘choose’ their constituents in the sense of portraying them or in framing them in particular, contestable ways” (Saward 2006: 301–302). The empirical task is to critically characterise populist publics, their relationship to the leader making populist claims, and draw from normative theory to reflect on these trends' implications to democratic life.

## Populist Publics

What then do we know about populist publics in the Philippines? Frederic Schaeffer's (2002) ethnographic work among slum communities is a productive starting point. Schaeffer observed that poor communities are often disparaged for their short-sightedness and poor political discernment. They elect “immoral” leaders such as Joseph Estrada. They sell their votes during elections. They deliver warm bodies in political gatherings in exchange for 500 pesos (10 USD). EDSA Tres – a popular demonstration that protested Estrada's ouster from presidency – is often depicted as an inferior case of political mobilisation. The masses that composed EDSA Tres have been dismissed as a *bakot* (transported) crowd paid off to destabilise Gloria Arroyo's newly formed regime backed by a coalition of civil society groups, the church and business community. Estrada supporters have been described as “rock throwing, wailing [...] pipe wielding goons”; as “polite company's worst nightmare” (Severino 2001). They may be victims of the Philippine apartheid, but their presence in EDSA signals no more than a personality cult that Estrada fostered throughout his political career.

Schaeffer's work provides a counterpoint to such portrait of what I refer to as “populist publics.” He makes a distinction between the classed definitions of what “good politics ought to look like.” While the

privileged segments of society consider transparent and accountable governance as central to democratic practice, impoverished communities view consideration and kindness as constitutive of “good politics.” Schaeffer refers to this as class politics of dignity – the kind that shuns callousness and insult characteristic of politicians who only remember their constituencies at election time, while loyalty is bestowed to those who paid attention and offered a helping hand. Walden Bello’s (2001) analysis of EDSA Tres is consistent with this interpretation, where he identifies class resentments against the rich as impetus for mobilisation. “To say that they were simply manipulated by cynical politicians”, Bello argued, “is to express a half-truth and to do the masses a great injustice”. EDSA Tres’s populist publics value the respect accorded to them by leaders like Estrada and place importance on being able to identify with politicians who make claims on their behalf.

The one-time presidential frontrunner Jejomar Binay built his political career on a similar logic. Before Binay’s popularity was tarnished by a series of corruption scandals leading up to the 2016 presidential race, he developed a reputation of cultivating empathetic relationships with his constituents. Glenda Gloria’s (1995) account of Binay’s routine as mayor of Makati illustrates how the politics of dignity operates in practice. Binay began his day early, “jogging along the streets of Makati’s poor districts and stopping by *carenderias* [canteens] to break bread with jeepney drivers and street workers”, and ended each day with “a visit to every funeral site in town.” While some interpreted these activities as enactments of patronage and personalistic politics, they were also a manifestation of the politics of dignity where the mayor considers it his personal responsibility to be in communion with his constituency.

To be sure, Schaeffer rejects the false dichotomy of choosing between “clean but exclusionary” and “dirty but inclusive” electoral politics. Ideally, democratic practice should be both clean and inclusive. But what his work exposes is the moral calculus of impoverished communities in conferring support to populists like Estrada as well as Binay, who are clearly not blameless, but nevertheless commanded the loyalty of a “colony of smelly, boisterous and angry people” (Coronel 2001). Populist publics are not simply manipulated and desperate citizenry. Instead, they hinge on citizens’ moral assessments, which decide whether to bestow or withhold support to politicians that have granted them recognition and esteem.

Could the same logic be extended to the supporters of Rodrigo Duterte? The answer, as the subsequent sections suggest, is a partial yes. Duterte’s supporters also reject the moral calculus perpetuated by the



Aquino regime, which makes a distinction between the “*desente*” (decent) and the vulgar, the clean and the corrupt. What they bring to the public sphere is a renegotiation of the narrative of contemporary politics by naming new enemies and bringing new tonalities into the political conversation. While Estrada and Binay’s type of populism is embedded in the politics of dignity, I argue that Duterte’s populist publics hinges on the politics of anxiety and politics of hope. Unlike Estrada and Binay’s case, however, Duterte’s populist publics are not class-based. His popularity cuts across classes, generations, gender and geography. Duterte’s populism, at least as far as the electoral campaign goes, is anchored on a different articulation of antagonism. The character of this antagonism is unpacked in the rest of this article.

## Methodology

The observations presented in the subsequent sections are based on an ethnographic study in Tacloban City, Leyte. The presented data draw from over 200 interviews and direct observations, shadowing political campaigns and informal conversations among communities recovering from Typhoon Haiyan over the course of two years. This research was conducted as part of a broader study that maps the forms of political participation in the aftermath of a mega-disaster. Electoral politics is part of this study, where I observed how disaster-affected communities take part in the first national elections since Haiyan.

By using an ethnographic lens, the hope is to gain insights into the everyday articulations of political support among Duterte’s constituencies. This approach is fitting to systematically examine the populist publics’ political logics – their explicit and implicit ways of claim-making, the forms of justification they offer for their support to Duterte and the taken-for-granted social conditions that makes penal populism resonate to broad constituencies. By “going out and getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of other people”, an ethnographic approach foregrounds the mundanity of political claim-making that other methods may consider “irrelevant or too ordinary” (Volo and Schatz 2004: 26). This micro-analysis aims to extend the conversation of Duterte’s rise to power, which has mainly focused on macro-orientation using the lens of political economy and cycles of presidential regime in the Philippines (Thompson 2010; Teehankee 2016). The goal of the present article is not to provide a rival interpretation of Duterte’s rise to power, as already discussed by various scholarly work (see Abinales 2016). Instead the aim of the subsequent sections is to shift the gaze to the everyday political

contexts of his supporters that makes penal populism an appealing political style. The following sections characterise how populist publics enact politics and examine the character of the public sphere that lends currency to Duterte's political style.

## Politics of Anxiety

The 2016 presidential race did not begin as a campaign defined by crisis. It started as a three-way race among candidates who promised to extend the benefits of the Philippines' phenomenal economic growth to the poor and middle classes. Campaign issues included broadening the coverage of the conditional cash transfer programmes and income tax reform. The scope of antagonism was limited to demonising candidates, either for corruption scandals (Binay), citizenship issues (Poe) or incompetence (Roxas).

Duterte's entry to the political centre stage changed the tenor of the political conversation. A latecomer to the presidential race, Duterte placed the language of crisis in the foreground, depicting the Republic as a nation on the brink of disaster and pointing to illegal drugs as the culprit. While Poe and Binay invoked the politics of personal dignity to distinguish themselves from the callous Aquino regime, it was Duterte's dystopian narrative that shifted the discussion towards a more urgent solution. Crisis can be averted. Drugs, crime and corruption can be eliminated. All of this comes with a price, and that price can be liberal rights. He would close down Congress if it threatened to impeach him. He would declare martial law if the Supreme Court interfered. His reign would be bloody and many would die, but his way is the only way to salvation.

The populist narrative gained traction. Low pay and illegal drugs emerged as the top issues that voters want their preferred presidential candidates to solve (*Pulse Asia Research* 2016c). It was a departure from polls that listed inflation, jobs and health as the top concerns among Filipinos (*Pulse Asia Research* 2015). A few hours after voting centres closed, Duterte's opponents began conceding the race. It marked a clear win for the political firebrand.

How did this happen? Could Duterte have been so masterful that he deluded voters into thinking that criminality and illegal drugs have spiralled out of control?

I argue that part of the reason for this narrative's success has to do with the latent anxiety already existing in the public sphere. By latent anxiety, I refer to a shared sense of distress among communities, but one

that remains in the background. It is present but not central, mundane but still worrisome, publicised but not politicised. The anguish brought about by the widespread use of illegal drugs is an example of latent anxiety. Reports of drug busts and petty thieves caught while high on crystal meth are part of the popular imagination, for they are not only staple features of primetime newscasts and tabloids but also folded into everyday realities in both privileged and slum communities. They are not spectacular enough to merit the national government's focus but they are serious enough to cause concern.

The notion of latent anxiety became clear to me as I examined my field notes and interview transcripts gathered over the past two years to reflect on why Duterte won the presidential race. A number of my respondents identified illegal drugs as a common concern in their communities and they have often been left to deal with this issue by themselves. For example, a project leader in one of the resettlement sites I observed cited the case of his neighbour addicted to *shabu* (crystal methamphetamine) as one of the most challenging issues he had to address. The community, reputed for having strong social bonds and norms of community participation, has internal mechanisms to discipline residents who violate their contracts of occupancy. In this case, the drug addict was asked to sign a document promising to quit his vice. Another violation would result to eviction, justified based on the neighbourhood's code of conduct. These warnings are issued, at least in the first instance, without the intervention of the police. These community-based responses assuage fear, albeit temporarily, until the next drug-related incident comes along.

While the use of illegal drugs in this particular community continues to be an aberration, such threat causes anxieties among residents, particularly mothers with young children. Owning a home in this neighbourhood requires strict adherence to the code of conduct, such as maintaining norms of respect and respectability. For mothers, their status as homeowners is something that their families earned after volunteering hundreds of hours of labour to build the houses, taking part in a series of "values formation programs" and complying with all of the community's stringent rules. Their children's vulnerability to illegal drugs is a cause of concern because it could cost them their homes and put all of their hard work to waste. This anxiety is not overtly articulated in interviews but alluded to in conversations, such as when one mother said her "only wish for her son is to stay in school and not do bad things." Only when prompted about what she considers to be "bad things" did "*droga*" (drugs) come up in the conversation.

The same observation is recorded in my field notes, based on conversations with slum communities along the coast waiting to be moved to permanent shelters. My key informant informed me that one of my respondents could not make it to our scheduled interview because she was recovering from a broken jaw, having recently been beaten up by her husband. “He’s an addict,” my key informant said in hushed tones. Some of the fathers I have spoken to tell stories of neighbours who could not take part in government-sponsored livelihood programmes because they are “undependable,” and “always absent.” It took more conversations before my respondents articulated drug dependency as reason for their neighbours’ erratic behaviour, when one of the drug addicts they were referring to walked up to us in one of our chats and said something incoherent. The fathers laughed nervously. One whispered *shabu* to me. In one of the roughest communities in Tacloban, my respondents, particularly the elderly women, would ask one of their male neighbours to escort me out of the narrow streets to reach the main road. One grandmother said, “It is safe here, but you might take a wrong turn. [You might] run into addicts [...] they might pick on you because you’re not from here.”

I offer these observations to illustrate how “the drug problem” was articulated in everyday conversations before Duterte placed this issue at the centre of national politics. The issue of illegal drugs was present but latent – they were acknowledged for having precise negative consequences for the community but they never really the focus of political conversations. Drug users were menaces who disrupt social relations, but it seemed that the dangers they pose were not central enough to warrant the sustained attention of the state. Instead, solutions to these issues were “privatised” – it was a problem resolved among neighbours, sometimes the local parish, sometimes NGOs and sometimes the *barangay* captain. The recurring problem itself was never solved with finality.

It is within this context that Duterte’s penal populism gained traction. Duterte’s anti-drug crusade recognised the public’s latent anxiety and politicised a normalised issue. The populist logic of painting a “dangerous other” gained resonance among a public that already recognised the dangerous other, but did not have the confidence to name and shame the enemy, out of fear or obligation to maintain community cohesion. Penal populism draws its discursive power from its capacity to attribute blame to both offenders and the political establishment that perpetuate shared anxieties. Duterte was able to render visible concerns that used to lurk in the background and was able to give a voice to a public that felt victimised by illegal drugs.

When I revisited the disaster-affected communities during the campaign period, some respondents were noticeably more vocal when they talked about their disdain for menacing neighbours – from those who go to sari stores with bloodshot eyes demanding cigarettes without paying, to those who recruit young teenage boys into the drug trade. “You better change now, Duterte is going to win,” said one of my informants, albeit in jest, to her next door neighbour, whom she suspects is also part of the drug trade. When I told her about my concern for Duterte’s violent language, the usually soft-spoken and tentative young mother of four confidently replied, “That’s just right!”

Such moral judgement – considering violent talk as “just right” – does not represent the case of a respondent with poor ethical calculations. Part of the populist public support for aggressive rhetoric is the promise of justice that comes with it. Citizens who often find themselves hassled by petty thieves and addicts envision a sense of finality, a sense that their everyday tormentors will be put in their place, even if it happens at the expense of due process. After all, what use is due process if it entails taking part in the slow and inefficient process of the criminal justice system? The deficiencies of the justice system was further exposed in November 2014, when news broke about the lavish lifestyle of drug syndicates in the New Bilibid Prison in Manila. National television broadcast pictures of a prison with cells converted to air-conditioned rooms comparable to high-end hotels, with a Jacuzzi, private gyms, a recording studio and its very own drug laboratory. For many, it was not an overstatement to say that the system was beyond repair.

The politicisation of crime and justice is often used as a “vote-winning playground for politicians” because they are powerful triggers for moral indignation among communities (Felizer 2009: 472), especially those who try to recover from a tragic experience like a mega-disaster by “doing the right thing.” A strong leader evoking a sense of control resonated to communities who wished to reclaim stability in an otherwise fragile context. The politics of anxiety was, to a certain extent, a productive political discourse, in the sense that it gave a voice and visibility to otherwise latent issues of social menace caused by illegal drugs. While some critics raised issues about human rights and due process, these issues – as far as my respondents were concerned – were secondary to the more pressing dangers they face every day (see Thompson 2016 and Reyes 2016).

## Politics of Hope

Fear is not the only sentiment driving penal populism. Together with the politics of anxiety comes the politics of hope. I use the term “politics of hope” for two reasons. First, the populist publics’ political action is oriented towards the future, investing what little resources they have to give voice not only to their fears but also their aspirations. In this sense, hope broadens citizens’ time horizons, viewing the future as something that is within the realm of their control rather than something that is left solely in the hands of elites. Second, hope captures the campaign’s positive orientation. In popular media, Duterte’s supporters are often caricatured as angry citizens resentful of the political establishment. However, equally as resonant as the resentment that goes with penal populism is a reclaimed sense of democratic agency. It overcomes sentiments of abandonment, for populism broadens the space for political action. Under-scoring political agency is crucial in this narrative in order to challenge the depiction of Duterte supporters as unthinking masses who are duped by a charismatic leader. Instead, this section portrays Duterte supporters as active participants in the campaign who can critically negotiate and reinterpret Duterte’s pronouncements.

The politics of hope enlivens democratic agency in various ways. First, disaster-affected communities practice democratic agency by performing reciprocity. “We’ve always been on the receiving end of help,” said a driver whose truck is covered with pictures of Duterte’s face. “But now we are in the position to help [Duterte in the campaign] [...] that makes me feel good.” In a number of establishments in downtown Tacloban is an orange and white banner that reads: “It’s our turn to help him. Rody Duterte for President. From victims of Typhoon Yolanda [Haiyan].” Alive in the memory of typhoon survivors is Duterte’s quick response in the aftermath of Haiyan, sending Davao’s world-class rapid response team to help in relief operations. The story goes that Duterte arrived with no fanfare, unlike most politicians who “come here, have their picture taken, upload [the photo] on Facebook and then leave”. This observation is widely shared among my respondents. A distinction is made between “*trapos*” (traditional politicians) who came to Tacloban to only to “talk to the media” versus Duterte “who was present to actually do something.” The talk versus action distinction is crucial in understanding why populist publics are forgiving towards Duterte’s sometimes offensive off-the-cuff remarks. The attention Duterte extended to my respondents outweighs his coarse language. “God must have been somewhere else,” said Duterte emotionally in a media interview when he came back to Davao from Tacloban. His empathetic description of

ground zero appeared as a stark contrast to President Aquino who was portrayed by my respondents as unaffected and “sleeping on the job” as Tacloban recovered from the world’s strongest storm. “Did you remember what the president said?” one barangay captain asked me, “Remember, he said, ‘but you’re still alive, right?’ That really hurt my feelings. As if we have to thank him that we did not die. But Duterte treated us like human beings,” she continued. Supporting Duterte, in this sense, is a moral act, a fulfilment of an obligation to help someone who has helped them in the past.

Their relationship of reciprocity with Duterte can be held in contrast to their relationship with the Liberal Party candidate Manuel Roxas. The former secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government is held in contempt not only for his perceived ineptitude in disaster response, but also for appearing to bully Tacloban’s distressed mayor at a closed-door meeting. Video of that meeting was leaked on social media and showed Roxas demanding that Mayor Alfred Romualdez hand over control of the city. “You have to understand, you’re a Romualdez, and the President is an Aquino,” Roxas told the mayor, referring to the historical rivalry between the two families. At that moment, Roxas personified the Aquino government’s malicious abandonment of Tacloban – the city, after all, is a Romualdez bailiwick. Duterte, in contrast, exemplified the virtues of a public servant who aided constituencies well outside the scope of his responsibilities. This narrative shapes the moral calculation of populist publics to return the favour to a man who did not abandon Tacloban.

Second, taking part in Duterte’s campaign allows communities to reclaim their esteem as citizens who can take charge of their political destiny. Elections in the Philippines are often defined by machine politics where “local bosses” deliver votes through vote buying and intimidation (Sidel 1999). Even as Duterte started gaining ground in the polls, major political parties claim that electoral machinery will ultimately define the outcomes of the elections. The populist publics that Duterte inspired repudiated such a system. Walden Bello (2016) described it as an electoral insurgency, where a resentful public rejected (electoral) politics as usual. However, this must be read with caution. The Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism reported that Duterte’s campaign was bankrolled by 13 large donors, which challenges the narrative that Duterte’s campaign was run on a shoestring budget (Ilagan and Mangahas 2016).

While acknowledging the role of big business in funding Duterte’s campaign, it is still worth recognising the citizen-led political action that disrupts traditional campaign practices. Populist publics challenged mon-

ey politics through modest ways of funding sorties and campaign paraphernalia. Local entrepreneurs mobilised their networks to provide mini-vans, sound systems, truck ads, banners and catering for campaign rallies. Elections are peak seasons for small entrepreneurs to make profits, but in this case, “we need to literally put our money where our mouth is,” as one printing press owner puts it. Overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) also played a role in democratising funding sources for Duterte’s campaign. Wristbands saying “Duterte | Atin” to “pre” (Duterte | He’s one of us) were ordered and paid for by a group of nurses from Jeddah who contributed USD 20 each so their families could distribute the campaign paraphernalia during graduation parties. March is “graduation season” in the Philippines – two months before the elections. As a cashier at a remittance agency explained:

It’s March now, usually they [OFWs] send money [for] graduation [expenses], but now they’re sending money, there, for printing ballers [bracelets] for Duterte, or, those t-shirts. When Pope Francis was here, we were selling memorabilia. But Pope Francis did not get people to order customised memorabilia, using their own designs [...] and spend their own money. It’s one thing to like a person, but it’s another thing to spend your money to [show support to] that person. Duterte made people spend!

Contributing funding for Duterte’s campaign also had its manifestations among slum communities. When Duterte held his campaign sortie in Tacloban, residents who were struggling to make ends meet found ways to commute to the plaza and listen to Duterte’s speech. This is not an easy achievement for communities that have been consistently disparaged by political elites, who limit their electoral participation to serving as *bakot* in campaign rallies. “I still went to [the other candidate’s] sortie because they paid us, but the feeling was different with Duterte,” said one of my key informants. She continues:

I really found a way to get to RTR [plaza], I persuaded pedicab drivers to give me a lift [for free], someone, someone I don’t know, finally, he said yes, and so we went and waited for Duterte. It’s really worth going [to the rally]. I cried when I saw him. I don’t know why. I’m proud I was there. I really found a way to be there [...] I don’t know what happened to the pedicab driver, maybe he did not earn anything that day. But I’m sure he wanted to be there too.

Such a sense of pride also extends to middle-class voters, such as a printing press owner who produced Duterte posters at a loss.



I've lost everything [from Haiyan] [...] but I am not selfish. I am not obsessed with money. I am proud that, [even if] it's only now that I can earn a profit, I let go [of the opportunity] because I want to support Duterte. I don't want others to say I just did it because I made money. I want to be *proud* [that] I sacrificed [profit] for our future president [emphasis added].

These statements, among others, illustrate how taking part in the campaign helped disaster-affected communities regain their esteem as active citizens. The pride the respondents refer to is drawn from a deliberate choice. Personal goals of recovery were sacrificed in favour of a political goal. Whether it meant cadging rides to see Duterte or giving up profit at a particularly lucrative period, supporting Duterte demands imagination for citizens to enact their political support.

Third, democratic agency is manifest in citizens' construction of their collective aspiration. The politics of hope hinges on Duterte's promise that uses the language of urgency. While the politics of fear gains currency from the immediate need for punitive measures to quell criminality, the politics of hope opens up spaces for citizens to visualise better conditions within their lifetime. Duterte's promise of eradicating corruption and reducing red tape "in three to six months" is particularly meaningful for communities that have been waiting for emergency shelter assistance for two years, or those waiting to have access to potable water for decades. Compared to the issue of drugs, which has been a latent concern, the immediate issue of delivering basic services to disaster-affected communities has been in the foreground. Duterte's "politics of I will" and his contempt for bureaucracy enables citizens to imagine their futures and make corresponding plans. One of my key informants during the campaign volunteered to organise Duterte supporters in the region. He was a seafarer who, after Duterte won, opted to stay in the country because "change is coming."

However, to characterise the politics of hope is not to romanticise the fragmented yet overwhelming public support that propelled Duterte to the presidency. Duterte's campaign is far from blameless. Local politicians have quickly jumped ship to support Duterte, evidenced by sample ballots enclosed with cash for vote buying that placed Duterte's name in the field for president. The vibrancy of campaigns offline does not absolve the vile, violent and sometimes untruthful commentary of Duterte's supporters online (see *Business World* 2016). These practices in both electoral politics and the public sphere indeed warrant critical assessment. However, these issues must not take credit away from the victory that populist publics can claim over formulaic politics that very few political

commentators and political strategists have predicted. Populist publics' political gestures may appear modest but, when contextualised in the history of electoral politics in the Philippines, are not insignificant. The politics of hope enlivens citizens' political efficacy and esteem, something that classic patronage or machine politics does not necessarily deliver. This story, at least as far as this limited case study is concerned, warrants recognition in contemporary political studies.

## Conclusion

This article argues that underpinning Duterte's penal populism are seemingly opposing, yet mutually reinforcing, logics of the politics of fear and the politics of hope. While the politics of fear exposes citizens' latent anxieties, the politics of hope foregrounds the role of democratic agency, esteem and collective aspirations. I hope that, by underscoring these two logics that support Duterte's rise to power, I have characterised how populism is a negotiated relationship between the populist and his publics – a relationship that runs much deeper than one-way manipulation and demagoguery. Populism, as the previous sections demonstrate, gives voice to pre-existing frustrations as well as life to new possibilities for conducting electoral politics. Support for populist leaders is a product of moral calculations the public makes, given their social status and broader political contexts. To this extent, populism can claim *modest* legacies for democratic practice, especially when it disrupts the electoral system that is partial to money and political machinery.

However, making this argument does not mean dismissing the view of populism as a pathology of democracy. Indeed, penal populism also creates a legacy of exclusion and divisiveness in liberal democracies. Although penal populism does give a voice to citizens' frustrations, it also silences the perspective of "the dangerous other" for they are considered enemies that should be eradicated. For example, this case study does not include the views of the families of suspected drug dealers who have been gunned down in Tacloban (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2016). The punitive foundations of the politics of fear limits the public's imagination for measured and systematic responses to the drug problem. Instead, it promotes spectacular short-term solutions to complex problems at the expense of human rights.

The politics of hope could also produce disproportionate optimism that could ultimately result in unmet expectations and further frustrations to electoral politics. It is not the first time the Philippines has encountered populist leaders, and this may not be the last time that a popu-

list leader will fall short of expectations. But if there is one lesson that the theory and practice of populism in the past decades can teach both academic scholarship and democratic citizenship, it is that populism is best understood with nuance and reflection, instead of replicating binaries that distinguish the virtuous and the dangerous. Populism is a conceptual category that is best understood in shades of grey, for black and white only serves to obfuscate the study of democracy.

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